Part V Landscapes

Chapter 22

Economic Landscapes

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Introduction

Just as cultural geography has its own sociohistorical geography – its own spatialized genealogy – so too does economic geography and so too do relations between economic and cultural geography. Although there is considerable intellectual traffic between geographers working in the English-speaking world (at least), and thus it is problematic to write of entities such as "British cultural geography," there are some real differences in the way subfields operate and change in different national contexts. In Britain, economic geography has been unevenly caught up in the so-called cultural turn in human geography. The face of British economic geography – as seen in textbooks, articles by well-known practitioners, and so on – has taken on a decidedly culturalist appearance (e.g., Lee & Wills 1997; Bryson et al. 1999; Bryson et al. 2000). This has not been without some argument and dissent (see e.g. Thrift & Olds 1996; Amin & Thrift 2000; Barnes 2001; Rodríguez-Pose 2001; Samers 2001). In North America, while the subdiscipline as a whole seems to have been less affected by such intellectual shifts, which in any case have been differently constituted and experienced, some of the most innovative and important work in economic geography has been marked by sustained attention to cultural matters (e.g., Gibson-Graham 1996; Pred & Watts 1992; Barnes 1996). Indeed, the story of a cultural turn (singular), with its implication of a recent, rapid, and coherent history, is simplified and exaggerated. It is easy to point to work in economic geography that has diligently and critically worked that boundary between culture and economy. This is especially true if we take a broad view of economic geography and include political economy and development geography (see e.g. Sidaway & Pryke 2000a, 2000b). It is perhaps not ironic that the cultural turn (as far as I can tell) began in part when cultural geographers worked to situate and analyze landscapes and their meanings within material historical political economies (especially Cosgrove & Daniels 1988; but see also Mitchell 1995, 1996; Roberts & Schein 1993; Schein's chapter 2 in this volume).

Expanding our considerations to a wider frame than geography and its subdisciplines, we can see that the worth of treating domains such as culture and economy

as separate in any meaningful way, has increasingly been questioned (although cf. Sayer 1997). The rise of "culture" as a thing and as an object of study has been well documented (Williams 1976). Likewise, the epistemological establishment of a separate sphere or domain labeled as "the economy" has been charted by a variety of scholars (including Meiksins Wood 1981; Buck-Morss 1995). The economy, perhaps more so than culture, grew into a sphere that was (and still is, in mainstream/neoliberal frames) understood to be subject to its own processes and laws. It has become a taken-for-granted commonplace to refer to laws of the "market," of supply and demand, for example. Such a conceptualization of the economy made it (more than culture) available for scientific analysis (Visvanathan 1988). Hence, there are Nobel prizes for economics but not for anthropology. Moreover, the science of economics has been a practical one – aimed at once at analyzing and ensuring the "progress of opulence" (Smith 1976 [1776]). It has, contradictorily, been about the economy as an autonomous sphere, but also about its management and regulation, most notably by the modern capitalist territorial state. For the second half of the twentieth century at least, the economy meant the national economy. National economies, both so-called developed and developing (see Ferguson 1994 and Mitchell 1995) came, in the post-Second World War era, and until the rise of neoliberalism, to be seen as spatially bounded spheres to be managed and governed by the state with the aid of varieties of Keynesian economics (Berthoud 1992; Toye 1993). It is clear that the mainstream of economic thought has shifted to a more neoliberal logic that stresses the state-market binary and claims that the market is best left alone by the state – at least as a general principle (Watts 2000). Such arguments go hand in hand with descriptions and explanations of globalization that emphasize and celebrate a free-wheeling global market that encounters national regulatory structures only as undesirable causes of costly friction (e.g. Friedman 2000). While it is perhaps obvious that accounts of globalization such as Friedman's are cultural products, we can also see accounts of the economy (economics) and the economy itself then, as cultural products. Even concepts such as needs or poverty can be seen to be crystallizations of social and cultural practices (see Levine 1988 on needs, and Yapa 1996 [cf. Shresta 1997], on poverty, for example). Like all cultural products, knowledges of the economy and practices of its management possess or, better, are born out of particular times and spaces and are a mass of contingencies, even though they are not experienced this way by most. Likewise starting from culture, we can see that culture anywhere cannot be understood as outside of, or apart from, the ways people struggle to secure livelihoods. Relations of production and exchange, be they classically capitalist or not, are part and parcel of culture. Notice I did not say "are fundamental to" because I am keen not to replay the old base-superstructure (economy-culture [or ideology]) formulations (see also Mitchell's chapter 5 in this volume). Taking cues from much (western) social theory that has been devoted to exploring the many complex intersections and interrelations between the so-called cultural and the so-called economic, and the political, I wish to do so in ways that hold each in tension and do not accord a priori primacy to one or the other. It seems that this is in fact a central, if implicit, feature of much human geography, no matter the subdiscipline with which it is identified.

So, economic geographers and cultural geographers are themselves socially or sociologically categorized subjects, rather than being any kind of rationally ordered

organizational reflections of an ontology ordered likewise. Of course, even though there is no essential "givenness" to the differences between cultural and economic geography, and even though we may be broadly invested in the same trajectory (as I argued above), there have been fierce antagonisms between cultural geographers and economic geographers in the past (see Hartshorne 1939; Butzer 1989). Further, there are still significant differences between cultural geography and economic geography as they are practiced today. These differences lie in theoretical inspirations and aspirations, key debates and animating concerns, research methods, and (to a degree) narrative styles (see Barnes 1996). The editors of this volume asked me to write as an economic geographer and discuss how I would approach the analysis of a landscape – a central activity of cultural geographers. How would an economic geographer approach, theorize, understand, explain this or that landscape? So, even though in this brief introduction I have argued against any assumed logic to the framing of such a task in terms of a culture-economy split, I shall proceed to carry out this exercise as a way of exploring how a place saturated with economic meaning – to the extent perhaps of making it appear only legible in economic terms, can be read as a nexus of all sorts of overdetermined relations (Gibson-Graham 1996: 26–9). Such relations refuse to completely settle in one or other realm, no matter that they are commonly exclusively ascribed to either economic, political, or cultural realms. In the study of aspects of the economy, and their associated places and landscapes, there is a substantial, even mainstream approach that is very much along such lines (see, as only a few examples of vast literatures, Corbridge, Martin, and Thrift 1994 on money and finance, or Herod 2001 or Kobayashi 1994 on work). Nonetheless there are some sorts of economic geography knowledges that remain more centered on the economy as their frame and as things taken to be 'economic' as their objects of analysis. Transport hubs, and particularly ports, have been treated this way. Here, I examine US maritime ports as places evincing a particularly interesting set of relations infused with economic, cultural, and (geo)political concerns.

Economic Geography and Transport Geography

In economic geography, there is an important tradition dealing with transportation. Transportation ought, in principle, to be a central concern of the subdiscipline, because it deals with distance. Distance is at the theoretical heart of space-time (Nystuen 1968; Massey 1993a, 1999) and of human geography. It has been at the center of capitalism's constant yet uneven restructuring – as David Harvey, above all others, has shown (e.g., 1989). Transportation geography has indeed emerged as an analysis of distance in capitalism – how it is calculated, meaningfully experienced (mostly by capital – the firm – rather than by labor), and articulated through material infrastructures or networks. Transportation geography has tended to include a large number of applied studies, and in general seems dedicated to the production of one sort or another of instrumental knowledge, most often via planning or policy (e.g., Tolley & Turton 1995). Methodologically, transportation geography has been closely associated with spatial science and with the application and development of quantitative analytical methods (see textbooks by Taaffe et al. 1996; Hoyle et al. 1998).

As transportation geographers recognize, the present globalization of policy prescriptions derived from neoliberalism is wreaking massive changes in the geographies of transportation at all scales and presenting them a tremendous opportunity. For example, the *Journal of Transport Geography*'s mission statement begins with this observation: "A major resurgence has occurred in transport geography in the wake of political and policy changes, huge transport infrastructure projects and responses to urban traffic congestion" (see *Journal of Transport Geography* 2003). The neoliberal insistence on liberalization cannot be realized without substantial material changes in the landscape. Specifically, it has resulted in considerable state sector and private capital investment in physical infrastructure designed to facilitate the opening of markets in material ways. Ports and airports, for example, are deemed in neoliberalism to be appropriate investments (and more appropriate than bread subsidies or social welfare measures) for the slimmed-down state. The World Bank and various bilateral aid agencies are heavily involved in such projects throughout the so-called developing world. Such civil engineering projects are just a part of the work entailed in making what is called globalization actually happen. Transportation geographers are seeking to map and understand such changes. Yet, for the most part, their analyses are not very critical of the general impulses of neoliberalism, even while they may be critical of various aspects of particular processes or policies.

Despite this overall state, transport geography has in the past been the site of some tremendously important critical work. For example, transport geography's methods were combined with elements from Hägerstrandian 'time geography' by feminist geographers Susan Hanson and Geraldine Pratt in their analysis of relations between journeys to work and the highly unevenly gendered urban spatialities of home and work (see Hanson 1995; Hanson & Pratt 1988a, 1998b, 1990, 1991). Hanson and Pratt's research in this area impacted transport geography, urban geography, and stands as a major contribution to feminist geography. Other areas in transportation geography seem less affected by concerns with social difference (e.g. gender), equity, or politics (more broadly conceived than in planning or policy terms) (although see Hine & Mitchell 2003 for an exception).

One part of transport geography that, it could be argued, has been only lightly touched by such concerns and that has had very little to do with cultural geography and vice versa, is port geography. Port geography has tended to be quite applied in orientation (see Hoyle 1996), although, because in many parts of the world old dock areas and waterfronts have become signal sites for urban redevelopment projects, some port geographers have moved closer to urban geography and more culturalist treatments of docklands developments (see e.g. Meyer 2003). On the other hand, it is interesting to note how few of the recent innovative cultural-urban geographies of Los Angeles pay any attention at all to the city's harbor/port (see Soja 2000, Scott & Soja 1996 as examples). This, despite the fact that the Port of Los Angeles is the biggest port in the US in terms of the volume of containerized traffic it handles. Together with the nearby Port of Long Beach the two southern Californian ports dwarf any other US port on any coast. Likewise, in terms of cargo value, Los Angeles and Long Beach if combined would rank first, even though separately they are only ranked below New York and Houston. For these rankings and one based upon cargo volume, see table 22.1 (see also figure 22.1).

Table 22.1 US Port Rankings, 2000

By cargo value (US$ millions)		By cargo volume (short ton 000s)		By container throughput (TEU 000s*)	
New York	19,732	S. Louisiana	217,757	Los Angeles	4,879
Houston	18,732	Houston	191,419	Long Beach	4,601
Long Beach	16,898	New York/NJ	138,670	New York/NJ	3,051
Los Angeles	16,732	New Orleans	90,768	San Juan PR	2,334
Hampton Rds	12,338	Corpus Christi	83,125	Oakland	1,777
Charleston	11,274	Beaumont	82,653	Charleston	1,629
Oakland	9,596	Huntington	76,868	Seattle	1,488
Miami	8,435	Long Beach	70,150	Tacoma	1,376
New Orleans	7,596	Baton Rouge	65,631	Hampton Rds	1,347
S. Louisiana	7,119	Texas City	61,589	Houston	1,074

Source: Compiled from data in AAPA 2002.
**Note*: A TEU is a maritime industry standard unit of measurement. It means 'Twenty Foot Equivalent Unit.' Containers typically come in 40-foot or 20-foot lengths. Using TEUs, various sizes of container can be counted in a standard unit.

Welcome to the Web site of the Port of Los Angeles, one of the world's largest, busiest, and most successful seaports. Located in San Pedro Bay, approximately 20 miles south of downtown Los Angeles, the port complex occupies 7500 acres of land and water along 43 miles of waterfront.

Your life is directly affected by what happens at the Port – from the clothes you wear, to the food you eat, to the well-being of the region you live in. The Port of Los Angeles could be "Your Best Liquid Asset." Thanks for taking the time to browse through our Web site to find out why.

Figure 22.1 Port of Los Angeles website welcome, 2003

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are clearly significant in terms of the overall geography of US international trade. More than this, though, these ports are embedded in the regional economy and culture of southern California in a myriad of mundane ways, as the promotional greeting on the Port of Los Angeles website claims.

What would a more critical and more culturalist (and it should be clear by now that I do not equate these two attributes) economic geography of a port (landscape?) be like? In the remainder of this chapter I present a preliminary approach to the Port of New Orleans as a way to explore some of the challenges entailed in such a venture. In the process I should perhaps specify that my inspiration comes more from the political economy tradition in economic geography than from the spatial scientific tradition, for example. In addition, I have found it productive to bring in insights drawn from political geography, and particularly from critical geopolitics

(see Herod, ÓTuathail, and Roberts 1998 for an earlier attempt to mesh these approaches).

Ports and Containers

If ever there was a place that, in a very material and quite obvious way, could be understood in terms of the intersections of myriad flows and overdetermined relations (see Massey 1993b, 1997) – a port would be a good candidate. Ports are scenes of comings and goings, of activity bundles (Pred 1977) bringing together the labor of greatly distanciated groups (of rubber tappers in Malaysia and stevedores in New Orleans, for instance) in the movement of commodities/products.

Ports are the hinges or valves articulating the national economy with the global economy. The US American Association of Port Authorities has 150 members. Public port authorities act in a variety of manager and landlord roles to oversee and coordinate the operation and development of the US's deep water ports. Through these 150 ports and others flow the bulk (in sheer volume, but also in value) of the national economy's tangible exports and imports. The US is trading as it never has, although the trade is unbalanced. At present the US has a truly enormous trade deficit with the rest of the world. According to official data, the trade deficit grew spectacularly through the 1990s. In 1991 it was valued at US$29.5 billion, but by 2002 it had reached over $435 billion (USTDRC 2000; USCB 2003).

Wal-Marts all across the US are filled to the brim with goods from China. From affordable clothing to toys to furniture, consumption by ordinary US shoppers nowadays is by importation. It is as if the commodity-hungry US economy sucks in sustenance every day, and much of that sustenance comes into the country through ports. Some high value commodities are imported via air freight, and a good deal of goods are transported via road or rail across the borders from Canada and Mexico, but the majority of imported "stuff" comes in through the country's ports. Bulk goods, like steel, lumber, and petroleum cannot be safely or efficiently containerized. However, most of the manufactured goods that fill the aisles of the country's over 3,000 Wal-Marts arrive in the US from Asia and elsewhere in standardized metal boxes known simply as containers. More than 50,000 containers arrive in the US each day (Bonner 2002: 14).

Containerization has had a revolutionary effect on the shipping and port industries, and has impacted a range of associated industries and labor, from rail and truck transportation to packaging and manufacturing of all sorts (Herod 1998, 2001; Winder 1999). In his historical study of this phenomenon as it impacted the Oakland port, Mark Rosenstein sums this all up:

> Beginning in the 1950s, a revolution occurred in the technological foundations of the carriage of goods by ships. A labor intensive, piece-by-piece break-bulk method of loading and unloading cargo was replaced by a capital intensive, industrial process – containerization. This new technology, in which goods are packed into a metal box, transported as a unit, and unpacked only at the final destination, had far reaching impacts on stevedoring, ship operations and ports. The effects were even more widely felt, since containerization facilitated intermodal transport. Now, a container could be carried by ships, trains, and trucks, effortlessly moving between modes of transportation by a mechanized lift-off, lift-on transfer. Despite its advantages, previous attempts at containerization experienced only limited success. The

efforts of Malcolm McLean and his firm Sea-Land Service, Inc. culminating with the departure of the vessel *Ideal X* carrying a deckload of containers from Port Newark en route to Houston in 1956 ushered in the modern era of containerization. (Rosenstein 2000: Abstract)

Containers themselves are fascinating commodities, technologies, and features of land- and seascapes. In the US, containers are showing up all over urban and rural landscapes. They are found at the back of shopping malls, as storage facilities for excess shop fittings or even inventory. They are seen all around construction sites where they function as tool sheds, cafeterias, offices, or latrines. Why are these 20 or 40 foot long metal boxes, originally manufactured for the ocean trade of commodities, showing up all over the US (and European) landscape? The answer partly lies in the seriously imbalanced global geography of trade. Every year, millions of standard steel shipping containers are manufactured – primarily in East Asia (China, South Korea). These are then filled with goods (and to a lesser extent commodities) for export. Giant ships (with displacements of over 70,000 gross tons), each loaded with thousands of containers then are unloaded in the ports of Europe and the US. The containers are typically put onto train or tuck chassis and off they go – intermodally – to the factories, warehouses, distribution centers, and stores. Some containers get re-used: they are filled with US made products for export and in turn get shipped to overseas ports, and so on.

The movement of containers around the globe is, at its most cost effective and neoliberal ideal, a perpetual motion of open circles. However because of two geographies of unevenness this does not happen. First, the simple developed-developing divide – where in the developing world there are barriers to entry in operation. Despite competitive pressures to up-grade, many ports cannot afford the sorts of investments necessary to support the handling of containerized cargo (see Airriess 1989; Hoyle & Charlier 1995; Wang 1998; and Song 2002 on interport competition). Such physical improvements require investments in dredging deep water channels, in reinforced wharves for storing containers stacked five high, and in large cranes that can lift heavy containers and that can reach across the largest classes of container ships (which can now be as much as 130 feet across the beam). These are major capital investments and, of course, displace much unskilled and skilled labor at the docks and in related industries (Herod 1998, 2001). So some parts of the world are not incorporated into these looping movements of containers. Most containerized traffic moves around (within and between) the three regional elements of the globalized economy – Europe, North America, Asia (east and southeast, primarily). The second geography of unevenness or asymmetry is the global pattern of trade surplus and deficit (Dicken 1998, 2002). Here, the US acts like a big sinkhole for goods and thus for containers. It is usually cheaper to buy a new container than to pay for the costs of shipping an empty one across the oceans. Thus, there is presently a huge oversupply of containers in the US. The industry of refurbishing, retrofitting and customizing containers has been an innovative sector and has produced a large range of adapted containers for sale, lease, or rent (see Seabox.com for example).

Containers appeared and still appear to assist the speeding-up and general efficiency of international trade. The doctrine (or dogma) of free trade or more generally of liberalization, would make the case for a geo-economy that is open, free of

onerous regulatory controls, a sort of smoothed space of flows (Hardt & Negri 2000), wherein goods, services, financial instruments, and money can flow about according to the beating of the market's heart – of supply and demand. Even though the World Trade Organization essentially operates according to such logic, the global trading system, much less the geo-economy, is not an 'ideal' free market. As an aside, it is of course quite reasonable to point out that the whole idea of the free market is more of a mythic rationalizing end point than a sought after ideal state of affairs – it is not so much desired for itself as it is desired because of the things that can happen in its name. In the frame of liberalization the job of ports is to ensure the speediest, most efficient, cheapest, and smoothest transition as containers move from one "mode" to another (ship-rail or truck to ship for example). Certainly the shipping companies, the shippers, the brokers, the buyers and sellers of the commodities, all pressure ports and the myriad classes of port labor to reduce the "friction" at the port, so as to enable rather than impede the flows across the modes. However, in the present situation, there are very strong forces pulling in the direction of greater reinforcement of the US's national borders.

(In)security

On October 28, 2001, *The Seattle Times* ran a story with the headline "Big Hole in Nation's Defenses: Our Ports," by reporter Susan Kelleher. Since September 11, 2001, and the emphasis on 'Homeland Security,' a new set of geographies of fear have emerged. Built upon older mappings and practices aimed at securing the country's borders (such as 'Operation Gatekeeper' along the US–Mexico border), these post-9/11 mappings identify particular loci reasoned to be sites of danger. These included virtually all transportation networks, with particular anxiety focused upon nodes – places, such as airports, where complex logistical transfers seemed to present a landscape far too unruly to ever be easily surveilled, governed, and secured. It was not long before "our ports" came more sharply into focus as sites of anxiety over securing the homeland.

Within overall fears about "transportation networks and land and sea borders" (Flynn 2002: 60), the item upon which most anxiety is mapped is the container. The "black box" nature of the container with its unknown and, in these times, therefore suspect interiorized contents has come to be a potent symbol of fear. In Stephen E. Flynn's article on "America the Vulnerable," in the influential journal *Foreign Affairs*, the visual image is a large photograph of a container vessel in port (Flynn 2002: 65), although the article is about much more than containers. In addition, in a recent newsletter from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, an article appeared that was titled "How Far Should Business Go to Protect Itself against Terrorism?" (Wharton 2003). The five-page article is headed by one photograph and that depicts a container ship being loaded or unloaded by a crane with a single container suspended in mid-air. The article details the many possible arenas of concern for managers in the private sector – from the food industry to utilities, information technology, and financial service businesses. The issue of ports arises twice in the article and the potential dangers of containers were mentioned once, apart from their being signaled in the only visual image in the piece. Not that the focus on containers is wrong-headed. In October 2001 a container bound from

Italy to Canada was found to have been adapted to house a suspected terrorist who was locked inside (*The Times* 2001). Because ports are border sites, they have become loci of fear through which thousands of apparently unknowable containers arrive daily and enter the circulatory systems of the national territory. Ports, sitting on the edges of national territory, are sites where issues of geo-economics and geo-politics meet. Before September 11, 2001, it looked as though the globalizing economy was trumping the political geography of the world. Yet now, influential analysts such as Flynn and "front line" officials such as US Customs Commissioner Bonner, have pointed to lax border security as the "soft underbelly of globalization" (Flynn 2002: 61), a condition that makes the "hardening" of US borders an urgent task (Bonner 2002: 6).

In the contemporary US, doctrines of national/homeland security co-exist with a general tendency to accept liberalization (albeit with a *de facto* national interest ever present and at work). But at the same time, the national/homeland security doctrine demands that the borders of the US be secured against potential dangers (see Luke 1991; ÓTuathail 1996; Slater 1999). The borders are to be patrolled, policed, and guarded through action at or along the country's edges, and increasingly within and beyond these lines too (Bonner 2002). John Agnew has pointed out that in a world of states (in)security lies at the heart of geopolitical imaginings of the world and vice versa, For example, he states:

> The focus on one's 'own' state and its security *vis-à-vis* the pre-emptive activities and potential depredations of others reflects the profound ontological insecurity (loss of predictability and order) of people in the modern world. The geopolitical imagination has offered a reassuring response. Our security was no longer vested in a transcendental religious order with earthly enforcers, such as the medieval Christian Church, a substitute had to be found. . . . The geopolitical simplification of the world into 'friendly' and 'dangerous ' spaces provided a practical means of giving order to this threatening and dangerous world. (1998: 70)

In the contemporary (post September 11, 2001) mappings of danger, security is seen as radically incomplete along every border and coast (Flynn 2002). Insecurity about terrorism has overlain extant fears of everything from child kidnappers to gun toting school children, and has been mapped onto the interior as well as exterior spaces of the nation-state. The current circumstances are not entirely brand new, but have resulted in a saturation of security regimes (most often referred to as 'measures') that have either been beefed up or newly installed in almost every space, from shopping malls in small towns, to ordinary workplaces, to student residence dorms (see Crang 2000 for a discussion of workplace surveillance for example). Along with this, security regimes have been even further embedded, enhanced, and extended at sites, such as airports and ports, identified as particular nexuses of vulnerability and hence fear. Security is in part a performative imperative – witness the recently mandated rounds of screening at US airports. But the screening that passengers experience is of themselves and their baggage. The movement of people has never been fully accommodated in the neoliberal view as it is found in the US. Liberalization is taken to justify the free movement of goods, services and finance as desirable, but this is not applied to people in general (see Sparke 1998). This uneven application of liberalization logics is, of course, one of the most often pointed-out contradictions of globalization more generally (see Sassen 1998, for example). While people

do come in through ports, their primary traffic is in goods. Nonetheless, the ports of the United States are sites of intense regulatory and surveillant activity by the state – governing both the flows and the edges. Thus, for example, even a relatively small port – the Port of New Orleans – lists the following federal governmental agencies in its directory (PONO 2002):

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Federal Maritime Commission
US Border Patrol
US Coast Guard
US Customs
US Department of Commerce
US Food and Drug Administration
US Maritime Administration
US Postal Service
US Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
US Department of Agriculture Federal Grain Inspection Service

(In addition, at New Orleans, the federal government is present in the form of several agencies associated with the US Department of Defense such as the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Naval Reserve Force.) So while there is a general ascription to free trade doctrines, the US state continues its longstanding interests in monitoring and regulating the movement of goods through (but especially into) the national territory.

The regulatory and security imperatives present at the ports operate through the construction of physical barriers (fences, for example), and through visual inspections, but increasingly combined with and through information gathering and processing. US ports are intense activity bundles but they are also knowledge bundles, comprising massive amounts of information and information processing. While US ports are continually investing in their infrastructure, in the form of concrete and capital equipment (cranes and so on), they are also heavily investing in information technologies of many kinds. The Port of New Orleans, for example, as part of a large-scale investment in a new container facility (the Napoleon Container Terminal) is installing computerized portals through which every truck will pass. They will enable trucks equipped with in cab transponders to process "paperwork" before actually entering the port. Drivers of such trucks may not even handle paper manifests and transport instructions. Such technology is clearly dedicated to smoothing the transfer of container from ship to truck, but also fits easily into new security regimes. Thus, for example, the new Transportation Security Agency recently awarded the Port of New Orleans three and a half million dollars to install electronic access control gates at the entrances and exits of its road system (PONO 2002: 7). A container, no matter whether it is on a truck or rail chassis or a ship, has individual identification marks and usually a barcode. Such marks are used to track the container, and such tracking may be in the form of paper records and/or electronic data. An old freighter carrying say, bulk frozen chicken, needs an inventory specifying how much chicken it is carrying and who it belongs to, and where it is to go to. A container vessel of the new larger class, carrying over 6,000 TEUs brings along in its wake (so to speak) as many inventories as there are containers. A container full of antique furniture, say, is required by US Customs to be accom-

panied by a manifest listing every single item in it. Such a container may hold hundreds or thousands of individual itemized objects. In the aftermath of September 11, as one of a number of policies adopted to "harden our national borders" (Bonner 2002: 8), the US Customs proposed a "Container Security Initiative" (CSI) aimed at establishing a system of prescreening for container manifests to be done at their port of origin. The CSI is effectively extending the US border thus far (March 2003) to the ports of Rotterdam, Le Havre, Bremerhaven, Hamburg, Antwerp, Singapore, Yokohama, Vancouver, Montreal, and Halifax. CSI agreements have been signed with other ports and the system is supposed to include Hong Kong, Shanghai, Pusan (S. Korea), Kaohsiung (Taiwan), and other ports in Asia and Europe in due course. CSI operates similarly to the Advanced Passenger Information System that US Customs and airlines have been using for some years.

The collection and presentation of inventory data is driven by regulatory requirements, but has spawned its own mini-industry of tailored applications of information management and analysis, upon which shipping companies and others rely. In addition, with the rise of just-in-time (JIT) production methods (most famously in Japanese-owned auto plants in the US case), and more generally because of the time-sensitive nature of many transported goods (plastic eggs for Easter; lawn furniture for spring/summer seasons), keeping track of containers while en route has become of interest not just to the shipping companies themselves, but also to agents, brokers, and their customers. Very large shipping companies appear to compete in part on the basis of their information systems and how useful they can be to their customers. Which company offers the best real-time options for tracking your containers as they make their way from A to B? Figure 22.2 shows some of the information contained on a tracking record for a single 20-foot standard container shipped trans-Atlantic from a small town in the southeast of England, to a small town in central Kentucky, USA. Such a record is accessible to the party shipping the container, in real-time via the internet site of the shipping company. Additional tracking information showed the rail moves from Norfolk to Louisville and included 29 separate entries on the container's location (and time) along the route.

Although the discourses and practices of liberalization in the economic realm and homeland security in the political-cultural realm can seem to be opposed, the imperative to collect, order, and process information is common to both. It seems quite plausible to see these intersections of relations as working through one another, rather than in opposition to one another in the ports of the US (see also Dalby 1998: 309) In addition, the rapid expansion of apparently routine information processing and the way such practices are increasingly coming to be what places (such as ports) do, cannot be seen as unconnected to geopolitics or to the US's 'grand strategy' in the age of George W. Bush and his war-machine (Gowan 2002).

Conclusion

In *Ecology of Fear* Mike Davis catalogs the main elements in the "dialectic of ordinary disaster" haunting Los Angeles. The giant oil refineries next to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are mentioned briefly as potential sources of major fires in the case of earthquake (1998: 42–3). Nowadays other geographies of fear and vulnerability are overlain on those detailed by Davis. The ports of southern

Container number TTNUXXXXXXX	**Size** 20-foot Dry Steel	
North American Customs Status		**North American Freight Status**
B/l number		
Place of receipt Little Chalfont, UK	**First activity date** 02-Nov-2002	
Place of delivery Midway, Kentucky, US		
CURRENT SHIPMENT		
Activity	**Location**	**Date and time**
Gate In Export Full	Felixstowe Trinity Terminal Felixstowe, UK	02-Nov-2002 13:40
Load Full	Felixstowe Trinity Terminal Felixstowe, UK	06-Nov-2002 04:17
Discharge Full	Norfolk Sea-Land, Norfolk Virginia, US	15-Nov-2002 08:37
Gate Out Import Full	Norfolk Sea-Land, Norfolk Virginia, US	16-Nov-2002 09:39
Gate In Import Full	Norfolk Sea-Land, Norfolk Virginia, US	16-Nov-2002 10:07
On Rail Full	Norfolk Sea-Land, Norfolk Virginia, US	16-Nov-2002 14.47
Off Rail Full	Norfolk Southern Railroad, Louisville, Kentucky, US	19-Nov-2002 04:50

Figure 22.2 Example of a container tracking record (excerpts)

California, like all ports, are no doubt doing their best to work with national and transnational capital and the US state to prevent disasters as part of the overall tightening of regulation and surveillance at ports, among the myriad practices going on in the name of 'securing the homeland.'

While obviously, a port is still basically a place "at which ships call to load and unload goods" (Moore 1975: 172), it can be seen a site through which all sorts of social relations, practices, and imaginings intersect. Ports, such as the Port of New Orleans, are places where the demand for cheap imported consumer goods, the uneven global geography of trade and current account "balances," the pervasive but differentiating mappings of fear, the technologically-mediated flows of information and goods, the interests of dock workers, shipping corporations, and the local state (port authorities) and the national state, are entangled in a dynamic and not at all settled mix. This mix, and the landscape it is part and parcel of, includ-

ing the fences and electronic gateways, makes no sense only as something economic or something cultural. Rather, ports are just examples of places where what these terms mean, and what their material and discursive geographies may be, are being defined and re-defined in little (and some big) ways every day in and through the tangle of relations that intersect there.

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